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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/09/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PM](#) [FAIR](#) [IR](#) [AL](#)
SUBJECT: DEMARCHE URGING GOA NOT TO SIGN IRAN AGREEMENTS

REF: WITHERS-JONES 11-9-09 EMAIL

Classified By: Acting Assistant Secretary Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Department requests that Embassy Tirana demarche appropriate GOA officials on an urgent basis, urging the Albanian Government to reject overtures by the Iranian Government to sign free trade and cultural exchange agreements with Iran and establish an Iranian airline hub in Albania. Please see paragraph 4 for talking points.

BACKGROUND

¶2. (C) Department understands per ref e-mail that Deputy Foreign Minister Edith Harxhi told Post that the Iranian Ambassador to Tirana recently delivered two draft agreements to Foreign Minister Meta during a courtesy call. Meta was surprised, however, when the Iranian Ambassador handed him a free trade agreement and another document which would establish a cultural agreement and education exchange program between the two countries. While the Iranian interest in discussing these issues appears to be long-standing, Harxhi said the Iranians are currently &pushing8 for signed agreements.

¶3. (C) Additionally, Department understands that according to Harxhi, the Albanian Civil Aviation Agency has been asked by Albanian Airlines to facilitate flights from Tehran to Tirana. Harxhi said the director of marketing for Albanian Airlines is scheduled to travel to Teheran in the near future to meet with her counterparts. Harxhi said Tehran would like to use Tirana as a hub for private charter flights to Western Europe, avoiding the Gulf.

POINTS:

¶4. (C) Department shares Post's view that the Iranian Government's overtures are motivated less by economic reasons and more by Tehran's desire to build political ties with Albania. Post is requested to draw on the following points in its demarche:

- Thank the GoA for seeking US input on the proposed Iranian agreements.
- Iran's overtures to Albania are attempts to create an impression of political and economic cooperation to distract the international community from concerns over Iran's nuclear program.
- Expanding economic cooperation by establishing direct flights to/from Tirana and Tehran would reinforce Iran's belief that its current path is acceptable to the international community, and that Tehran has no reason to adjust its behavior to fulfill its international obligations.
- Strengthening Albania's ties to Iran would be inconsistent with Albania's desire for Euro-Atlantic integration. While other countries have commercial ties to Iran, Albania's relatively small market size would mean that a few commercial flights originating/ending in Tirana would create the

impression of a much bigger Iranian footprint in Albania, particularly if Albania were to embark on a dramatic expansion of air ties at this time.

- Iran is actively attempting to evade the sanctions the international community has imposed on it, which it has done for decades. These attempts include finding new places in which to conduct business. Albania should avoid the risk imparted by opening itself up to serving as such a business hub.

- Moreover, the advent of direct flights between Tirana and Tehran, and the use of Tirana as an Iranian hub, could expose Albania to the risk of unwittingly contributing to Iran's proliferation and/or support for terrorist activities. Specifically:

Iran has repeatedly demonstrated that it is willing to use international transportation air, land, and maritime networks to conduct shipments in violation of UNSCRs 1737, 1747, and 1803.

In 2007, in the wake of the United Nations Security Council's adoption of UNSCR 1747, Iran attempted to export a cargo of munitions to Syria via train through Turkey. The prohibited cargo was discovered only when the train was derailed by a terrorist attack.

In 2008, UNSCR 1803 cited Iran Air Cargo and the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) as entities whose cargoes to and from Iran should be subjected to inspections at Member States, seaports and airports, provided there are reasonable grounds to believe that the aircraft or vessel is transporting prohibited goods. The UNSCR was adopted in recognition of the serious risk of Iran using commercial transportation entities to conduct proliferation-related shipments of concern.

Just this year, three prohibited Iranian exports of arms or related materiel on board commercial maritime vessels of non-Iranian states) the Cyprus-flagged M/V MONCHEGORSK, the German-flagged M/V HANSA INDIA, and the Antigua-flagged M/V FRANCOPI) have been halted thanks to the vigilance of states alert to Iran's deceptive transportation practices.

Any expansion of Albanian air links to Iran runs the risk of Albanian territory or flag carriers being ensnared in illicit Iranian procurement or export-related activities. Iran has repeatedly demonstrated its willingness to use foreign flag carriers, as well as its own, to conduct prohibited shipments.

15. (U) Please report results of demarche to Department.
CLINTON